Counterpunch

A Report from the Capital

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Getting Ahead in Washington

Robert Leiken and the Golden Rolodex

It's called the "Golden Rolodex," and it refers to what the *National Journal* once called the "informal but intricate network...of former government officials, academic specialists, think-tank associates and a few journalists who advise decision makers and...help frame the public debate." The privileged group of "experts" who make it to the Rolodex are always the first to be called to appear on TV talk shows, solicited to write op-ed pieces for major newspapers, and invited to testify before Congress and to serve on government commissions.

The case of Robert Leiken provides interesting insights into the inner workings of the Golden Rolodex. It was Leiken, recall, who in the mid-1980's was the most prominent member of the "Gang of Four," the quartet of Democratic Party activists who helped line up congressional support for Ronald Reagan's war on the Sandinista government (FSLN). In a 1986 address to the nation, The Gipper cited Leiken's hostility to the FSLN as proof that even bleeding hearts had given up on the Sandinistas.

Earlier this year, Leiken was named executive director of the U.S. Information Agency's (USIA) advisory panel on TV and Radio Marti, the government-funded propaganda vehicles controlled by the anti-Castro zealots at Miami's Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). The panel recently reported to USIA director Joseph Duffey, who is to brief Congress by July 1 on his recommendations in regard to the continued operation of the Marti stations.

Leiken's appointment to the panel was noted in a recent story in *CubaInfo*, a small newsletter edited by Julia Sweig and sponsored by the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University. Headlined "Contra Propagandist Serving as Marti Panel Staff Director," the article was based on a review of Reagan-era declassified documents that show Leiken met several times with Oliver North and also helped European-based USIA officers to "develop the capability to explain and defend U.S. Central American policy."

Most damning of all is a January 19, 1985 memo from Walter Raymond, a long-time CIA employee who then headed the Office of Public Diplomacy, to National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane. In the memo, Raymond wrote that Leiken had approached him "at a face-to-face dinner and suggested that he would like to help":

"[Leiken] believes we have a fairly good chance of winning the *Contra* fight on the Hill if we play our cards right...His proposed package includes several elements which I will tick off for you below:

- "Build a positive image of the [*Contras*]. To do this we should send down one or more key journalists to start developing major positive stories.
- "We must clean up the image of the [*Contras*], particularly removing known violators of human rights...We need a cleaned up package."

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Of Guerillas, Gorillas, and Edward van Kloberg

Until a few months ago, newspaper readers would likely have believed that Rwanda's total population was 320, this being the estimated number of endangered mountain gorillas which inhabit that country's forests. The apes, made famous in "Gorillas in the Mist," the 1988 movie starring Sigourney Weaver as American researcher Dian Fossey, were the exclusive focus of virtually all news items on Rwanda prior to April of this year.

A Nexis search which cross-referenced Rwanda with "gorillas" vs. "guerillas" resulted in a rout by the apes, 1,123 to 138. And 91 of the references to the humans have come since April 6, when President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down outside Kigali.

Warfare has been waged in Rwanda since 1990, when rebels from the largely Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded the country from neighboring Uganda. Their goal was to topple Habyarimana's repressive Hutu government, which was installed in a 1973 military coup and which is responsible for most of the massacres now in the headlines.

The fighting attracted the attention of Western journalists, who, while largely unconcerned with human suffering, expressed grave anxiety about the apes. A 1991 story in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* provided little information on the war's political context, but cautioned that "observers fear the gunfire is disrupting [the gorillas'] routine and threatening [their] long-term welfare."

Human casualties mounted in 1992, with human rights groups reporting roughly 2,000 civilians killed in the fighting and hundreds of others raped or tortured. Western weaponry poured in, mostly from France but including $2.3 million in arms bought from the U.S.

The media's focus remained unchanged. Anguish reached fever pitch in mid-year, when Weaver's co-star in "Gorillas in the Mist," Mrithi, a male silverback, became the first ape casualty of the war (apparently the accidental victim of an edgy guerilla patrol). *The Chicago Tribune* lauded the victim as "a magnificent, gentle animal with many human characteristics." *The Christian Science Monitor* ran an 800-word obituary on Mrithi, lamenting that the "needless snuffing of [the ape's] short, noble life leaves a void we will not soon see filled."

It was more of the same last year. A *Reuters* story in May was typical, leading with the news that 36 apes had been reported AWOL from the Virunga mountain region following an RPF offensive. The gorillas were also "threatened by land mines planted in the...civil war," said the story's author, who casually noted near the bottom of the article that "the conflict has made more than 350,000 people homeless and ruined the lives of close to one million."

The media's previous lack of interest in the human consequences of the war is now mirrored by the Clinton administration's *laissez-faire* approach to the crisis. *The New York Times* reports that the government has instructed its spokesmen to abstain from using the word genocide when discussing the killings in Rwanda, though, with up to 400,000 people murdered, almost all Tutsi, that's precisely what's taking place.

Clinton fears that use of the word genocide might fan public passions, and increase pressure on his government to stop the carnage. "Some American officials acknowledge that the Administration's posture lacks candor," said the *Times*. "But many argue that the land-locked African nation has no ties to the U.S.—and no oil or other resources that would make American intervention worth the cost."

On the subject of Rwanda, it was no surprise to find that D.C. lawyer Edward van Kloberg has on several occasions represented that country in Washington. Generally recognized as the capital's most unprincipled lobbyist, van Kloberg's other clients have included Zaire, Burma, Iraq, Liberia and El Salvador. Van Kloberg also once sought to represent the German People's Alliance, a fictitious neo-Nazi group created by *Spy* magazine.

According to records on file at the Justice Department, van Kloberg in the fall of 1990 arranged the D.C. visit of then-President Habyarimana. In a series of activities, including a posh reception at the Grand Hotel, van Kloberg touted the stern but wise leader's great popularity among his country's masses. Unfortunately, the trip was cut short by the RPF's Oct. 1 invasion from Uganda.

With the war causing serious public relations difficulties, the Rwandan regime in late 1990 signed a one-month deal with van Kloberg. For the sum of $11,000, the lobbyist was to help Ambassador H.E. Aloys Uwimana "counterbalance any negative influence [that human rights groups] might exert on U.S. policy." That's shorthand for covering up government abuses to assure the continued flow of U.S. assistance, which totaled $9 million annually at the time.

Van Kloberg's contract also called for promoting "measures undertaken by the Government of Rwanda in the areas of environmental conservation and wildlife management." America's adoration of the mountain gorillas made this an especially clever strategy, and one which had helped Rwanda extract U.S. monies for conservation projects. That was the sole interest of President Habyarimana, whose own relatives were widely believed to be involved in the international trafficking of gorillas.

While completely bereft of moral principle, van Kloberg is ranked by *Washingtonian* as one of D.C.'s 50 top lawyers. "One of lobbying's true characters," said the magazine in its 1993 survey, "his dinners for legislators and opinion-makers at the jockey club are legendary for their goofiness, with van Kloberg acting both as social director and salesman."

A former congressional staffer who worked on African affairs says that van Kloberg's high standing in local social circles rarely helped his clients. "He tries to be suave and debonair, but comes across as paternalistic and patronizing," she recalls. "His views on Africans were offensive and racist. I could never figure out why anyone would hire him." •

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Lawyers, Guns, and Money

Predicting that Bill Clinton would renew China's most favored nation (MFN) status, as ***Counterpunch*** did a few issue back, was not a terribly risky step. Annual bilateral trade of $43 billion and direct U.S. investments in China of $4.8 billion, up from $548 million in 1991, ensured that the decision would go Beijing's way. With Seattle-based Boeing Co. on the verge of signing a $5 billion deal with China, even Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), sponsor of single-payer health care legislation, pressed hard for extending MFN.

Important cover for Clinton was provided by a number of other liberals, including Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.). He pled China's case in an impassioned speech to his colleagues a few weeks before the decision was announced. Kerry's address was almost certainly coordinated with the White House, which was besieged by corporate lobbyists pushing for MFN renewal. "[China's backers] lined up support from domestic and foreign business groups," says a congressional staffer. "It was major, major pressure."

Clinton was obliged to argue that extending MFN marked a huge triumph for human rights, a tactic which was echoed by business leaders. "Trade is part of the solution—not part of the problem," said Calman Cohen of the Business Coalition for U.S.-China Trade. "[As] the U.S. business presence in China grows, so will the attendant human rights of the Chinese population," D.L. Burnham of Abbott Laboratories said in a note to the president—one of more than 800 letters corporate leaders sent to Clinton on Beijing's behalf.

Of course, most U.S. business leaders don't give a wit about human rights, in China or anywhere else. Given the opportunity, many firms would surely make use of Chinese prison labor, with corporate p.r. departments boasting of the increased serving size and high nutritive content of company vis-a-vis state chow.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged 60 major American firms to pressure China for greater political freedom, a request which was greeted with a decidedly tepid response. "We would find that very onerous," Tracy O'Rourke, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said of the HRW's call for business leadership on the human rights front.

Dozens of top Washington lobbyists and consultants have been assisting U.S. firms seeking to do business in China. These players include:

- Republican campaign consultant Ed Rollins, last seen domestically in New Jersey's gubernatorial election, who recently signed a lobbying deal with three Chinese regional development agencies.
- Former Secretary of State Al Haig, head of Worldwide Associates Inc., a D.C. consulting firm, who has helped United Technologies win contracts in China. In a recent TV interview, Haig defended the crackdown at Tiananmen Square and said protestors there were seeking higher wages, not political liberties.
- Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and ex-White House chief of staff Howard Baker, who led a group of U.S. business executives to China in February. The Chinese are especially fond of Eagleburger, who traveled to Beijing for a pleasant round of high-level meetings shortly after the Tiananmen massacre.
- Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who serves as a consultant to many U.S. businesses operating in China.
- Former Sen. Gary Hart, who late last year visited China on behalf of US West and other major firms.
- Carla Hills, Dennis Whitfield, Joseph Massey and Erin Endean, all whom have parlayed past stints at the Office of the United States Trade Representative into lucrative business consulting careers.

The media was nearly unanimous in supporting an extension of MFN, in part due to journalists' overwhelming reliance on highly biased sources, including many of the figures cited above. Earlier this year, *The Washington Post*'s Thomas Lippman reported that "much of the American foreign policy establishment" believed that denying MFN to China would be "counterproductive, harmful to larger U.S. interest in Asia, unacceptable to China and probably doomed to failure."

Lippman failed to mention that several of his key sources, including Kissinger and Eagleburger, make money promoting business in China. It's as if a news story touting Microsoft products heavily quoted Bill Gates without identifying him as company chairman.

Journalists endlessly repeated many of the self-serving myths offered up by the China lobby. One of the most ridiculous is the notion that the U.S. simply had no leverage to pressure Beijing, which, went the argument, would have simply turned to Germany and Japan if restrictions were placed on its MFN status.

The Chinese have a $23 billion annual trade surplus with the U.S., which takes in 38 percent of Beijing's exports. Replacing such an important commercial partner is no simple matter, a fact that would have given the Clinton administration plenty of negotiating strength if it had truly wanted to press Beijing. •

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Leiken, from p. 1

By labelling Leiken a "propagandist," the *CubaINFO* story provoked a strong reaction inside the Beltway. In a letter to Paul Wolfowitz, the Dean of SAIS and formerly the Reagan administration's Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, Leiken demanded a "full retraction and an apology" from Sweig.

The three full members of the Marti panel—William Doherty of the American Institute for Free Labor Development, which financed military coups in several Latin American countries; Peter Strauss, a conservative Democrat and former director of the Voice of America; and Sydnee Guyer Lipset, whose skimpy resume suggests that her primary qualification to serve on the panel is her marriage to neo-conservative Seymour Lipset—called Sweig's story "unprofessional, sophomoric and peevish." They said Leiken's job as executive director was "not to draw conclusions for us but to present us with evidence"—as if evidence were itself neutral.

The harshest reaction to the article emanated from the American Enterprise Institute's Mark Falcoff, who accompanied Leiken to at least one meeting with Oliver North. Sweig's story was a "gratuitous attack," said Falcoff in a letter to Wayne Smith, director of the Johns Hopkins Cuba Exchange Program:

Anyone who knows Bob...knows that he is utterly incapable of acting dishonestly...Had he turned his eyes away from the truth about the Sandinistas, or written about them the way that so many of their American friends have been wont to do, he would have been far better off financially and professionally.

Contacted by phone, Falcoff was unable to provide names of scholars or writers who had grown rich by promoting the Sandinistas. He insisted, though, that the "fastest way to get an academic job is to take a left-wing position on Latin America. Anyone with an anti-communist background won't even get a job interview."

Asked to comment on that assertion, Professor William LeoGrande of American University listed several prominent conservatives safely ensconced in Latin American studies departments around the nation, and pointed out that two recent presidents of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), the largest organization of professional Latin Americanists, have been moderate Cuban exiles highly critical of the Castro government. "The idea that someone couldn't get a job because of their conservative views is absolutely wrong," said LeoGrande.

Falcoff's portrayal of Leiken as having suffered for his political views—he described Leiken on the phone as a victim of "left-wing McCarthyism"—is equally outrageous. A one-time Maoist and organizer of the Mexican peasantry, Leiken was an obscure associate at the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace prior to his backing of the *Contra* cause. His denunciations of the Sandinistas were carried in major stories in *The New Republic* and *The New York Review of Books*. *Time* soon commissioned an admiring profile of Leiken.

Though his position was not renewed at Carnegie—the case with many associates—Leiken soon found refuge at Harvard's Center for International Affairs. His work there was financed with a $75,000 grant from the far-right John M. Olin Foundation, which has funded the work of Samuel Huntington, Irving Kristol and Robert Bork. Leiken recently completed his Ph.d. at Oxford, and now, with the Marti panel, has found government employment.

Joining the Reagan administration's anti-Sandinista crusade proved to be even more rewarding to Leiken's "Gang of Four" colleagues: Penn Kemble, a prominent Democratic cold warrior, now has a top position at the USIA (he reportedly helped Leiken get the Marti panel position); Bernard Aronson became Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs for George Bush; and Bruce Cameron runs a lucrative lobbying outfit. "I couldn't have made it as a lobbyist if not for my work for the *Contras*," Cameron acknowledged in an interview. "The contacts I made on the center and the right made my career."

The charge of McCarthyism is especially offensive coming from Falcoff, who in his letter urged Smith to tell Sweig that "people in this town have long memories, and if she expects to play a role here in the future, she had better clean up her act." That threat of retribution—eternal banishment from the treasured Golden Rolodex—is McCarthyism in its purest form.

After learning of the dispute, Wolfowitz announced himself "disturbed" by what he deemed a "personal attack" on Leiken. He dropped the matter after reviewing the documents on which the *CubaINFO* article was based. Sweig also received important support from Smith, LeoGrande and Cynthia McClintock, the president-elect of LASA. The latter wrote Wolfowitz that it was "reasonable to raise the question of how someone's involvement in mobilizing U.S. support for the *Contras*...might affect his or her assessment of Radio and TV Marti."

And what of Leiken's work at the USIA? Predictably, the panel he headed recommended the continued operation of both Radio and TV Marti. The latter, in addition to being a prime display of U.S. arrogance, is particularly stupid since the Cuban government jams its broadcasts and its programming is virtually unseen on the island.

The report by the panel—welcomed by the Cuban American National Foundation as a victory for "free expression"—whitewashed charges of political bias at Radio Marti, saying programming met "established standards for objectivity." This was especially pleasing to CANF leader Jorge Mas Canosa, whose well-documented verbal and physical threats against liberal Cubans in Miami have been covered by many media outlets but not once by 10-year-old Radio Marti.

What happens now? The USIA's Duffey, widely seen as a spineless yes-man, will almost surely endorse the panel's report. TV Marti will then get a $7 million handout from taxpayers. Leiken is rumored to be in line for steadier employment with the VOA. And if Mark Falcoff has his way, Julia Sweig, guilty of straying beyond the boundaries of acceptable thought, will never again have lunch in this town. •

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